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AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION.

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REPORT ON THE PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF MICHIGAN.

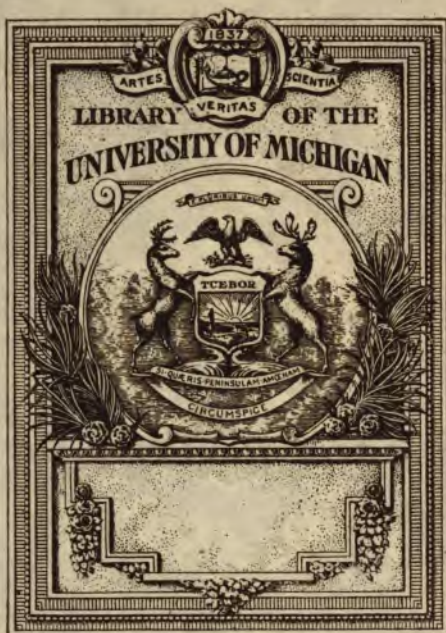
BY

HARLOW S. PERSON.

(From First Report of Public Archives Commission in the Annual Report of the
American Historical Association for 1900, Vol. II, pages 60-63.)

WASHINGTON:
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1901.



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REPORT ON THE PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF MICHIGAN.¹

The compiler is of the opinion that there is not, among the records in the State capitol at Lansing, much material of value to the student of history. Michigan did not become a separate Territory until 1805, and documents relating to the period before that date are not to be found among the archives of the State, while during the years of its existence as a Territory (1805-1837), Michigan, outside of Detroit, shared but little in the important events transpiring elsewhere. The existing material for this early period which has been preserved by the State relates mainly to the movement and settlement of population, in the form of records of the organization of counties; to internal improvements and land speculation; to trade with the Indians and the condition of the Indian tribes, etc.

Such is the condition of the public records and documents at the State capitol that any report short of a thorough listing and cataloguing must be very general. No thought, apparently, has ever been given by the legislature of the State to the preservation of the State archives as such. The secretary of state is required by statute to keep the original acts of the legislature, to cause the acts and resolutions to be bound and preserved in his office, and to publish and distribute State manuals, official reports, acts, etc. The various departmental officials are expected, as a matter of course, to preserve and file documents and correspondence. Among the acts relating to offenses against property, the stealing of any "writ, process, or public record" is made

¹ For references to other accounts of the archives of Michigan, see the "List of printed indices to and descriptions of archives and other repositories of historical manuscript" in the First Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission (Report of American Historical Association, 1896, Vol. I, p. 510).



larceny. But no provision has ever been made for the formal housing and classification of State documents and papers as public archives.

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR.

The papers in the office of the governor have been until recently in extremely bad condition, piled on shelves and on the floor, moldy and dirty, and some of them falling to pieces. Great improvements have lately been made, however, in the storing. The present executive clerk has had the papers filed in boxes on the shelves of a vault, but for lack of help has as yet been unable to have them classified and catalogued. Among these files are to be found documents and papers relating to internal improvements, military affairs, applications and recommendations for appointments, State roads, public lands, distribution of the surplus, tariff, nullification, organization of counties and townships, Indian affairs, requisitions, pardons, communications from other States, letters received and copies of letters sent, and a few messages in manuscript. There are but few papers and documents, however, relating to any one of the above subjects, and the aggregate quantity is not large.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

Until recently the records and documents, especially the latter, in this office were in a very unsatisfactory condition, being piled together in boxes and on shelves, with no attempt at classification or listing. Within the past few years, however, considerable improvement has been made. The documents have been classified and systematically stored in convenient files. A printed catalogue of books (i. e., all material, whether printed or written, in the form of bound volumes) was issued by the secretary of state in 1896; unfortunately, however, copies are now difficult to obtain outside of the office. The present secretary of state has caused all unbound papers and manuscripts to be listed. This list has not yet been published, but may be consulted at the office.

The material listed in the catalogue of books comprises minutes, papers, and proceedings of the governors, judges,

and legislative council of the Territory; governors' messages, house and senate journals and documents, proceedings of constitutional conventions, engrossed Territorial and State laws, public and private; original bills and resolutions of house and senate, election returns, order books, warrants, requisitions, pardons, reports of State and local officials and departments, oaths of office, land patents and records, charters and reports of corporations, opinions of the attorneys-general, letters, etc.

The documents and manuscripts listed in the unprinted catalogue include the originals of many of the printed or bound records mentioned in the preceding paragraph, and papers relating to Indian affairs, organization of counties, the five-million loan, internal improvements, military affairs (1800-1838); petitions, remonstrances, and applications addressed to Territorial governors; articles of association and annual statements of banks, railroads, and mining companies; the southwest boundary and Toledo war, election returns (1800 to date), commissions, letters received (1808 to date), and copy books of letters sent (1857 to date). It is impossible to state very exactly the amount of this material, but the total is small.

STATE LIBRARY.

The material in the State library consists of books and bound newspapers, and is carefully shelved and protected. There are no collections of manuscripts, documents, or State papers not found elsewhere. Important items are: (1) Notices of some early laws prior to 1805; (2) laws of Michigan, 1805-1873; (3) acts of Michigan, 1874 to date, being a continuation of the laws; (4) house journals, senate journals, and joint documents, 1835 to date; (5) proceedings of the first and second constitutional conventions, 1836. The library also contains files of newspapers of this and other States, a number of them of dates within the first half of the nineteenth century, which are the property of the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society. Housed here are also a large number of pamphlets belonging to the same society. These are private property, and are neither classified nor catalogued, nor are they accessible to the public. A cursory

examination shows them to consist mainly of old reports of State officers, with a few political pamphlets.

The only finding list of the publications of Michigan is that compiled for a forthcoming issue of Mr. R. R. Bowker's "State Publications." No provision is made by the State for the publication of documents of historical importance.

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